U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Kemmerer Field Office Date June 2002

SMITHS FORK ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the balanced management of the public lands and resources and their various values so that they are considered in a combination that will best serve the needs of the American people. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield; a combination of uses that take into account the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and nonrenewable resources. These resources include recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife, wilderness, and natural, scenic, scientific, and cultural values.

1791 (090)
Smiths Fork Road Improvement EA
WY-090-EA02-079

June 19, 2002

Dear Reviewer:

This Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) on the proposed Smiths Fork Road Improvement is furnished for your review and comment. Written comments will be considered in the decision if they are received by July 30, 2002.

The decision on the proposed Smiths Fork Road Improvement project will be based upon the analysis in the EA, public concerns and comments, and other multiple-use resource objectives or programs that apply to the project. A Decision Record, detailing the decision of the BLM and its rationale for the decision, will be prepared and distributed upon request as soon as the decision is reached following the end of the 30-day review period.

Comments on the content of this EA should be sent to:

Ms. Kelly Lamborn, Team Leader
Bureau of Land Management
312 Highway 189 North
Kemmerer, Wyoming 83101

Comments, including the names and street addresses of respondents, will be made available for review by the public at the addresses listed below during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays, and could be published as part of subsequent documents related to this proposal. However, individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name and/or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

The BLM appreciates the individuals, organizations, and Federal, State, and Local Governments who participate in the environmental analysis process. Your involvement enhances the integrity of the EA and the public land manager's ability to make an informed decision.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jeff Rawson

Jeff Rawson
Kemmerer Field Manager

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
SMITHS FORK ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Based on my review of the analysis in the Smiths Fork Road Improvement Environmental Assessment (June, 2002). I have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan and will not have any significant impacts on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. Further explanation of the finding is provided below.

The environmental assessment shows that adverse impacts to surface ownership/use and grazing; livestock management; socioeconomics/environmental justice; cultural resources; paleontology; soils/watersheds; water resources; air quality/noise; vegetation/riparian areas; wildlife and fisheries; threatened, endangered, candidate, and special status species; visual resources; and from the use of hazardous materials would all be minor, short term, necessary and due impacts. Potentially substantial positive economic impacts could result for the public as well as local, state and federal governments.

The Kemmerer Field Office, Kemmerer Resource Management Plan provides for the use of these public lands for public access. The Proposed Action would be in conformance with this land use plan, and an amendment to the RMP would not be necessary to implement the Proposed Action.

Approval*:*

_____
Kemmerer Field Manager

_____
Date

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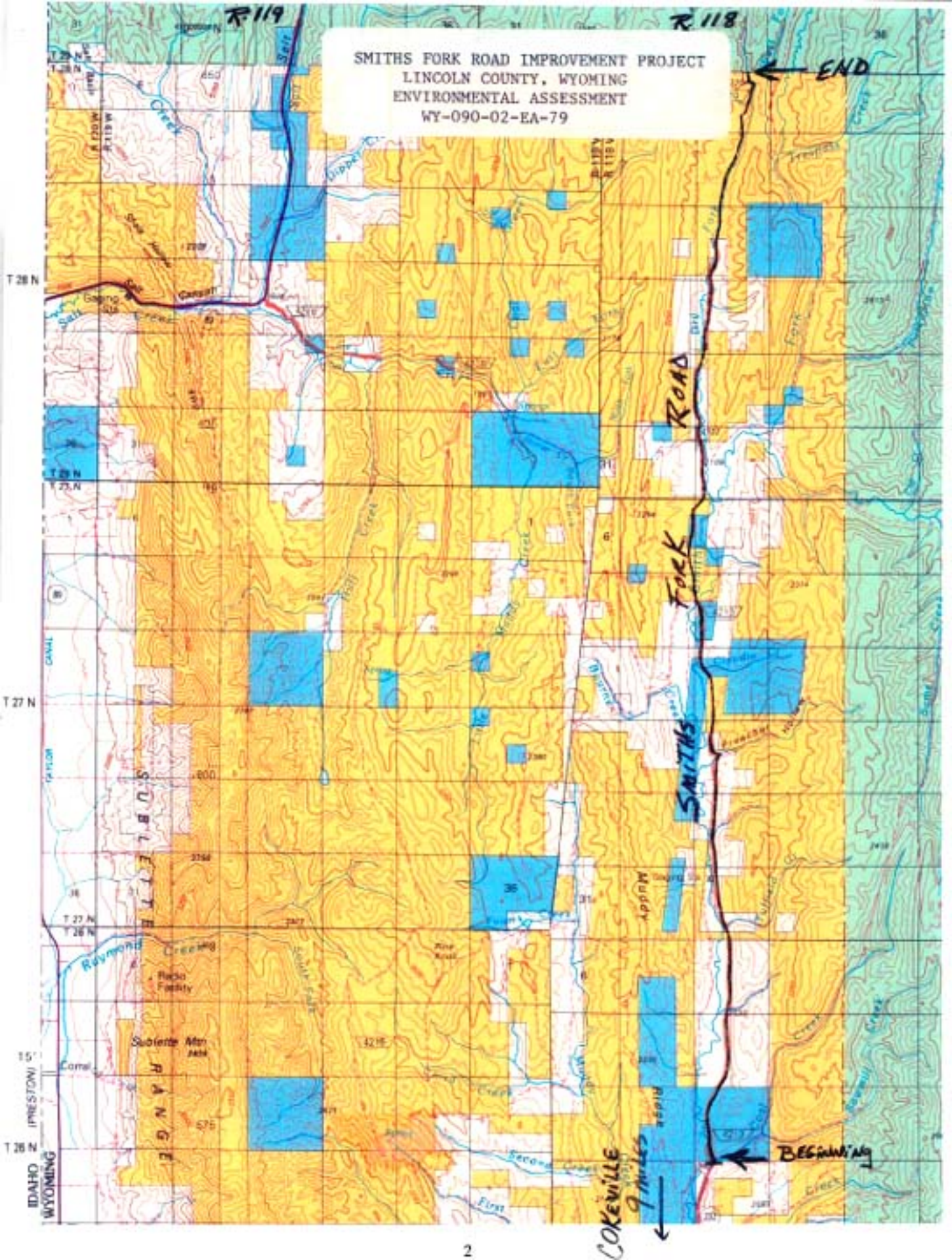
SMITHS FORK ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
LINCOLN COUNTY, WYOMING
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
WY-090-02-EA-79
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BEGINNING
SMITHS FORK ROAD
COKEVILLE 9 MILES
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IDAHO
WYOMING

SMITHS FORK ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
Lincoln County, Wyoming
BLM Kemmerer Field Office
Environmental Assessment
WY-090-02-EA-79
June 2002

INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Smiths Fork Road (BLM Road 4213), located in Townships 26, 27, and 28 North, Range 118 West, Lincoln County, Wyoming, proceeds north from the end of Wyoming State Highway 232, which is approximately 12 miles north of Cokeville, Wyoming, and runs approximately 16 miles where it connects with a narrow dirt surface Forest Service Road at the boundary of the Bridger/Teton National Forest. The Smiths Fork Road has been in use as a southern seasonal access route to the Upper Smiths Fork Valley and the Sublette, Tump and Salt River Ranges since the establishment of area homesteads and the beginning of summer grazing in the early part of the 1900's.

In 1973 and 1974, permanent exclusive easements, 50' either side of center line along the Smiths Fork Road, were acquired by the BLM where the road crossed approximately 9 miles of private land and 2 miles of State of Wyoming land. The acquisition of easements created a legal public use road and allowed the BLM to formally enter the road into the BLM transportation system, and to expend public funds to construct, upgrade, and maintain the road.

Following acquisition of the easements, the road was bladed and shaped out of native earth to widths varying from 12 feet to 20 feet, and culverts were established at various water drainages points along the road. In the late 1980's a new bridge was constructed over the Smiths Fork River in section 9, T. 27 N., R. 118 W. No guardrails were installed, however, and the approach on the north end has alignment problems.

Maintenance, consisting of blading and shaping, is conducted annually, but cannot correct the design problems associated with the road. Today, a reanalysis of the road indicates that it lacks culverts at key locations and has numerous vertical grade changes that trap water, all resulting in poor drainage across the road.

Seasonal vehicle travel along the southern and central segments of the roadbed, where the soils are fine textured and exposed, coupled with poor road alignment and problems with existing culverts and drainage ditches, is resulting in accelerated soil erosion and associated siltation of the adjacent Smiths Fork River and Dry Fork Creek. Furthermore, vehicle use of the exposed soil roadbed during dry conditions is a significant contributing factor in localized wind erosion and associated air quality degradation along and adjacent to the southern and central segments of the road.

CONFORMANCE WITH LAND USE PLANS

The Kemmerer Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved through the Record of Decision in April, 1986, outlines broad objectives in the management of the road and associated resources. The proposed action has been determined to be in conformance with the outlined objectives of the Kemmerer Resource Management Plan to initiate actions that help minimize soil loss, reduce sedimentation, increase fisheries values, and protect and enhance air quality.

Additionally, the Smiths Fork Road helps meet the recreation objectives of the RMP by facilitating public access to outdoor recreation opportunities on federal lands in the Upper Smiths Fork Valley, and Sublette, Tump and Salt River Mountain Ranges.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action

The proposed action describes actions to improve/upgrade the entire 16 miles of the Smiths Fork Road, within the existing 100 foot easement. These upgrades include widening the travel surface to 20 feet; realigning and leveling the road; replacing all of the existing culverts and cattle guards; installing 30 new culverts; reconstructing lateral drainage ditches; and applying a four inch crushed rock surface on the entire roadbed. Additional associated actions will include constructing a guardrail on the existing bridge; refencing the boundaries of the easement where fences currently reside; and seeding all ditches, cut and fill slopes, and disturbed staging areas with a native species seed mix at the rate of 20 pounds per acre.

The contract to perform the road upgrade work could be offered in the Fall of 2002. Construction would begin in the Summer/Fall of 2003. Detailed construction plans are available for review at the BLM Kemmerer Field Office.

No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would result in the entire 16 miles of the Smiths Fork Road remaining in its present condition. Annual maintenance will continue. Site specific problems with culverts and road drainage would be corrected on an individual need basis.

Alternative Considered But Removed From Further Analysis

An alternative was considered to realign and upgrade the Smiths Fork Road beyond the present 100 foot easement corridor. The purpose was to move the road further away from the Smiths Fork River and Dry Fork Creek at points where the road was wedged between the waterways and the steep slopes. Moving the road over into the steep slopes would have required an enormous amount of slope cutting and removal of soil. The cost associated with this alternative, and the associated additional environmental disturbance, made this proposal unrealistic and not attainable.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The mandatory critical elements of the human environment listed in Table 1 have been reviewed for possible impact from implementation of the proposed action, and the no action alternative. The critical elements that could be affected or need further clarification for affect will be addressed. Additionally, other elements of the human environment that could be affected by the proposed action, or no action alternative, will also be addressed.

Table 1: Critical Elements

ELEMENT	AFFECTED PROPOSED ACTION	AFFECTED NO ACTION
Air Quality	No	Yes
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	No	No
Cultural Resources	No	No
Farm Lands (prime or unique)	No	No
Flood Plains	No	No
Native American Religious Concerns	No	No
Threatened or Endangered Species	Addressed	No
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	No	No
Water Quality, Drinking or Ground	No	No
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	Addressed	Addressed
Wild and Scenic Rivers	No	No
Wilderness	No	No
Environmental Justice	No	No
Invasive, non-native species	No	No

Setting

The Smiths Fork Road runs north and south in the Smiths Fork River Valley lying between the Tump Range and the Sublette Range, and bordered on the north by the Salt River Range. The valley is comprised of native meadows and upland grazing lands along the northern portion of the road, and irrigated hay fields, native pasture and upland grazing lands along the southern portion of the road. The Smiths Fork Road continues north into the Bridger/Teton National Forest as a low standard narrow dirt road.

Air Quality

Air quality is very good with low ambient concentrations of pollutants and suspended particulates. Background visibility is at around 170 kilometers.

Visual

The landscape adjacent to the Smiths Fork Road has been evaluated on a scale of A, B, or C for its apparent scenic quality based on seven key factors: landform, vegetation, water, color, adjacent scenery, scarcity, and cultural modifications. The evaluation rated the landscape as scenic quality B, which identifies a landscape that is moderate in visual appeal.

The Smiths Fork River area was rated as a Class III visual resource management area through the Resource Management Plan process. The management objective for a Class III area is to allow for changes that attract attention but are not dominant. The objective is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape, but any changes should be moderate.

Soils

Soils in the vicinity of the southern and central segments of the Smiths Fork Road are characteristic of floodplains and low terraces. These soils are generally deep, loamy to clayey in texture and derived from alluvium. The soils are generally highly susceptible to wind and water erosion. Soils in the vicinity of the northern segment of the road are more characteristic of mountains. They are generally alluvium in fans and drainages and are moderately deep gravelly loam to loamy clay in texture. Erosion susceptibility is high.

Vegetation

The vegetation along the Smiths Fork Road easement is a mixture of predominantly grasses with an interspersion of woody shrubs. Woody shrubs include mountain big sagebrush, bitterbrush and some willow in the wetland/riparian areas. Dominant grass species are Idaho Fescue, Thickspike Wheatgrass, Columbia Needlegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, Basin Wildrye, Nebraska Sedge, Tufted Hairgrass and Meadow Foxtail.

Noxious Weeds

The area along the Smiths Fork Road is vulnerable to infestations of invasive/noxious weeds such as Canada thistle, musk thistle, and black henbane. Lincoln County Weed and Pest District have kept the weeds in check by spraying along the roadway. As a result, infestations of weeds along the roadway are minimal and are expected to remain at that level with planned annual spraying.

Cultural

The project area received limited attention by investigations designed to identify cultural resources prior to the completion of fieldwork for BLM's Class III cultural resource inventory of the Smiths Fork Road in 2001. The BLM inventory report will be completed and sent to the State Historic Preservation Officer for concurrence by July 31, 2002, and the review process required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be finalized by September 30, 2002. A Class III cultural resource inventory is an intensive field inspection of-the-ground surface for the purpose of identifying cultural resources. Four Class III inventories previously examined approximately 140 acres in the project area. As a result of these inventories, one cultural property was identified in the valley of a tributary of the Smiths Fork River: 48LN1455 is a prehistoric camp and historic sheepherder camp evaluated significant and eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) because of its scientific information values. The BLM's Class III inventory of the road right-of-way documented two additional cultural properties. The historic Button graves and the Twiss Cabin, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are located at Button Flat. They are currently unevaluated for eligibility to the NRHP. Prior to completion of BLM's Class III inventory report, the sites will be evaluated with consideration of the four National Register criteria of eligibility. No other cultural resource sites are documented within or immediately adjacent to the Smiths Fork Road right-of-way.

Native American Concerns

The Smiths Fork Road right-of-way contains no known Native American cultural values or concerns.

Consultation with Native Americans, to identify traditional values that may be affected by the proposed action, was not conducted due to the proposed action being contained within an existing road right-of-way. This would not result in changes in land use, substantial physical changes to lands or resources, changes in access, or alienation of lands.

Wildlife & Fisheries

Several species of big game animals occur in the area. It is elk and mule deer spring, summer, and fall range. About six miles of the northernmost section of the Smiths fork Road goes through designated elk calving habitat. Approximately 10 miles of the southernmost section are moose crucial winter/yearlong range, and the upper six miles is yearlong moose range. A variety of other wildlife including songbirds, raptors, small mammals, and carnivores such as coyotes and foxes inhabit the upper elevation sagebrush-grasslands, aspen stands, and riparian areas that characterize the project area. There are no known raptor nests within 1 mile of the project area.

Threatened & Endangered Species

Several species listed as threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species may be present in the project area (letter from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; June 3, 2002). They are the black-footed ferret, Canada lynx, bald eagle, gray wolf, whooping crane, mountain plover, and yellow-billed cuckoo. Existing data was analyzed in conjunction with a field survey conducted on June 10, 2002, to determine the presence/absence of suitable habitat for these species.

There is no suitable habitat for mountain plover because the area receives sufficient moisture so that there is little bare ground, and the cover of vegetation taller than 4 inches is largely continuous. There is no habitat for black-footed ferrets because there are no prairie dogs present. No suitable habitat exists for whooping cranes due to the lack of appropriate wetlands. Several small willow and cottonwood stands are scattered along the Smiths Fork River and Dry Fork Creek, but they are not extensive enough to provide suitable habitat for yellow-billed cuckoos.

There is a bald eagle nest on private land approximately ¼-mile below the bridge crossing the Smiths Fork. This nest is in a cottonwood tree along the river, and at its nearest point is approximately 200 yards from where construction would occur on the Smiths fork Road. This pair of eagles has successfully fledged young from the nest for the last four years, and the nest is again active in 2002.

The project area is within a Lynx Analysis Unit. The Wyoming, Salt River, and Tump Ranges contain suitable lynx habitat, and the Smiths fork Road currently provides access to portions of these areas. A radio-collared lynx used forested areas within approximately 5 miles of the project area. However, the project area is primarily within open sagebrush-grasslands, and does not traverse coniferous forest habitat.

The project area is suitable habitat for gray wolves because it is mostly undeveloped and an abundance of prey such as deer, elk, and moose are present. At least one gray wolf has been documented in the general vicinity of the project area, although no established packs or dens are known to exist there. This was a single wolf killed by USDA-Wildlife Services because of livestock depredations attributable to this animal on a nearby grazing allotment. Any wolves within the project area would be considered part of the non-essential, experimental population resulting from the reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone National Park.

Sensitive Species

The Smiths Fork River contains Bonneville cutthroat trout (along with Snake River cutthroat trout, brown trout, and mountain whitefish which are not sensitive species). The small tributary streams below the bridge and Dry Fork Creek are also potential habitat for the Bonneville cutthroat trout. These streams also provide suitable habitat for the leatherside chub, although it is not known whether they are actually present. The Bonneville cutthroat trout population in the Smiths Fork River is currently stable. Parts of the river, especially around the Smiths Fork Bridge, receive moderate fishing pressure. It is likely that sediment delivery to the Smiths Fork River from the adjacent Smiths fork Road has caused declines in the quantity and quality of spawning habitat for these species, due to the siltation of gravel beds. Additionally, several culverts within the project area currently do not allow passage of fish and are preventing movement of fish within some sections of the system.

The project area is suitable habitat for sage grouse. There are no known leks <1/4-mile, but three leks are <2 miles of the Smiths Fork Road. One of these leks is known to be active, and the activity status of the other two is unknown.

Suitable habitat may exist in the project area for several other sensitive species that occur in sagebrush-grassland or aquatic habitats. These include the dwarf shrew, long-billed curlew, sage thrasher, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, Great Basin Spadefoot, Boreal Toad, and Spotted Frog.

Wetlands/Riparian

It is estimated that approximately 10 acres of wetlands are within the boundaries of the 100 foot easement. The wetlands are a mix of Lotic (streamside) and Lentic (wet meadow) riparian types. The Lotic sites are comprised of places where the road crosses streams and places where the stream channel meanders into the edge of the road or parallels the road. The Lentic sites are where roads cross wet meadows.

Wild & Scenic Rivers

The Smiths Fork River, and Dry Fork Creek, have been reviewed for outstandingly remarkable values for wild and scenic rivers eligibility and were found to be non-eligible.

Economics

The economy in the greater Cokeville community, which includes the Smiths Fork Valley, is generally rural agricultural. The Smiths Fork Road supports very light rural agriculture and recreational visitor economic activity. It is estimated that on an average summer/fall day only around 20 to 30 vehicles will use the road.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Impacts of the Proposed Action

Air Quality

The proposal to improve/upgrade the Smiths Fork Road by surfacing the native earth roadbed with gravel would result in positive seasonal localized air quality affects from current conditions. Surfacing the roadbed would reduce the amount of particulate dust that is generated by motorized vehicles using the road during the dry summer and fall months.

Visual

The proposal to improve/upgrade the Smiths Fork Road would not change the visual class rating of the area. Furthermore, upgrading the road would not adversely impact, in the short term, the visual Class III management objectives by significantly changing the character of the landscape. In the long term, however, reconstruction of the Smiths Fork Road will in all probability accelerate development of summer homes, or year around dwellings, on the private lands accessed along the Smiths Fork Road. The landscape may change in character from a relatively undeveloped setting to a landscape depicting a more developed setting with homes, roads and power lines.

Soils

The proposed action would have both a neutral and beneficial impact to the soil resource depending on the activity. Approximately 163,000 cubic yards of soil would be removed out of cut slopes. Additionally, another 29,600 cubic yards of top soil would be stripped, saved, and reapplied on the cut and fill slopes, and drainage ditches. All disturbed areas would be successfully reseeded. These actions would have a neutral affect on the soil resource. Surfacing the roadbed would have a positive affect on the soil resource by reducing loss of soil through wind erosion as a result of vehicle use of the road in the dry summer and fall months. Furthermore, the reconstruction of drainage ditches and placement of additional culverts, coupled with reseeding efforts, would reduce loss of soil from the road easement through overland runoff.

Vegetation

Upgrading/improving the Smiths Fork Road would have a short term (1 to 2 year) affect on the vegetation resource. The current vegetation will be removed during reconstruction activities. Within one to two years, however, reseeding efforts should restore vegetative cover to the disturbed sites adjacent to the roadbed.

Noxious Weeds

Soil disturbance during road construction would increase the susceptibility of the roadway to support noxious weeds. Weed prevention measures are in place however, and any infestations will be treated.

Cultural

The proposed action will not affect cultural property 48LN1455, identified by a previous cultural inventory, because it is located outside the area of potential effects of the undertaking. The Button graves and Twiss Cabin are located within the area of potential effects and, should they be evaluated eligible to the National Register of Historic Places, the BLM will develop appropriate treatment measures to mitigate potential adverse effects on the property. Furthermore, there is no potential for the undertaking to affect historic properties not detected by the cultural inventories because the proposed upgrading will be contained within areas previously affected by the original road construction, where no evidence of cultural resources was observed.

Native American Concerns

No Native American values, issues or concerns are known within the right-of-way and there is no potential to affect Native American cultural values that have not been previously identified. The proposed action would be contained within an existing road right-of-way and would not result in changes in land use, substantial physical changes to lands or resources, changes in access, or alienation of lands.

Wildlife & Fisheries

Some wildlife would be disturbed or displaced by construction activities under the Proposed Action. Disturbance to calving elk would be minimized by application of a stipulation preventing construction in designated elk calving areas between May 1-June 30. No disturbance to wintering big game would occur, because construction would not occur during the winter. Additionally, a small increase in traffic and associated human activity would be expected to occur following completion of construction. Slight increases in disturbance, displacement, and mortality of wildlife (especially big-game animals during hunting seasons) would result. A small amount of habitat for some species would also be lost in areas where the ROW would be widened. However, the existing road has already compromised this habitat. The impacts to big game and other species are expected to be minimal.

Threatened & Endangered Species

Because of the relatively close proximity of the bald eagle nest to the construction area and the fact that construction would occur during the bald eagle nesting period, there would be a substantial increase in disturbance associated with construction to the nesting eagles. This could result in their failure to fledge chicks during the one year that construction takes place. Nest failure from abandonment would be more likely to occur if disturbance near the nest is initiated during incubation, or while the chicks were very young. Increases in traffic and associated human activity following construction are expected to be slight, and would not affect the eagles' ability to successfully breed in subsequent years.

Because the project area is not located within coniferous habitat, it is very unlikely that any lynx would be displaced by construction activities. The small increases in traffic and human activity that would be expected to result from this alternative would increase the possibility of disturbance or displacement of lynx from suitable habitat. Such increases in traffic and human activity could also result in mortality of lynx due to collisions with vehicles or illegal shooting, although such events would be very unlikely to occur. The impacts to lynx under this alternative would be minimal.

If any gray wolves were present in the project area, they would likely be displaced during construction. This disturbance would be inconsequential, given the large amount of suitable habitat surrounding the project area that would be available for displaced wolves to use. Increases in traffic and human activity could lead to mortality due to collisions with vehicles or illegal shooting, especially during hunting seasons when increases in human activity would be greatest and when most people have firearms with them. However, wolf mortality resulting from the implementation of this alternative would be rare. The impacts to gray wolves would be minimal.

Sensitive Species

Bonneville cutthroat trout (along with other fishes) would likely benefit from the implementation of this alternative. Sediment delivery to the Smiths Fork River and Dry Fork Creek from the adjacent road would decrease, which would improve spawning habitat within and downstream of the project area. Replacement of culverts would reduce barriers to fish passage within the system, provided that these culverts are properly installed.

Sage grouse lekking activity would not be disrupted during construction, because the nearest known active lek is approximately 1 mile from the project area. Although sage grouse nesting probably occurs in the vicinity of the project area, it is very unlikely that any birds would nest in close proximity to the existing Smiths fork Road. Therefore, sage grouse nesting activity would not be disturbed. Increases in traffic and human activity could cause increased sage grouse mortality due to increases in hunting pressure or collisions with vehicles. However, these impacts would be minimal.

The dwarf shrew, long-billed curlew, sage thrasher, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, and sage sparrow could be displaced by construction activities. A small amount of habitat for some of these species would also be lost in areas where the ROW would be widened. However, the existing road has already compromised this habitat. Some individual Great Basin spadefoots, boreal toads, and spotted frogs could be killed during installation of culverts or other construction activities in riparian areas, although such events would be very rare. Impacts to these species would be minimal.

Wetlands/Riparian

It is estimated that less than four acres of wetlands would be affected as a result of upgrading the Smiths Fork Road. No significant impacts will occur as a result of this small area of minimal disturbance.

Wild & Scenic Rivers

The proposed action would have no affect on the Wild and Scenic Rivers status for the Smiths Fork River or Dry Creek.

Economics

The proposal to improve/upgrade the Smiths Fork Road would have no significant affect on economic activity associated with agricultural or recreational use of the road. Traffic would not significantly increase. It is estimated that construction cost for the road upgrade would run between $1.3 to $1.5 million.

The expenditure of an estimated $1.3 to $1.5 million for the reconstruction of the Smiths Fork Road would have short term positive economic benefits in the Cokeville community and for the community where the successful contractor is located. Individuals involved in construction activities would purchase food, fuel, lodging and services locally during the 2003 construction season. Wages generated by the workers, and profits realized by the company, would circulate to a large extent in the community where they reside.

The Smiths Fork Road upgrade exhibits few significant economic or social benefits when compared to the high cost. Economic activity, associated with use of the road, would not change significantly following completion of the road upgrade. It is estimated that upgrading the road would result in less than eight additional recreational vehicles per day during the summer/fall season in the short term. Long term (10 to 20 years) recreational use of the road may increase proportionally to the growth in population along Utah's Wasatch Front. Upgrading the Smiths Fork Road would enhance access to the valley and may contribute to a slight increase in the number of new summer homes, and year around homes built on private lands in the Smiths Fork Valley. Regional increases in population in the long term would probably have a greater affect. The Smiths Fork Valley, however, is not a high interest destination point, and interest in the valley is not projected to change significantly in the near future as a result of upgrading the road.

Private lands adjacent and accessible to the Smiths Fork Road would increase in value, in the short and long term, as a result of the improved/upgraded road. Economic activity in the local Cokeville community would also increase slightly as a result of a small increase in recreational visitors using the Smiths Fork Road, and from any development of the private lands that may be attributed to the upgraded road condition.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative

Air Quality

Under the no action alternative, localized air quality degradation would occur from particulate dust released from the roadbed to the atmosphere as a result of motor vehicle travel during the dry summer and fall months. The affects, however, are not great enough to significantly change the background visibility of the area or the overall air quality of the region.

Visual

No significant changes to the visual quality of the area would occur in the short term under the no action alternative.

Soils

Leaving the Smiths Fork Road in its current condition would result in a continuation of accelerated soil erosion through overland flow along most of the 16 miles. Loss of soil through wind erosion will also occur as a result of dust released to the atmosphere from vehicle travel during the dry summer and fall months. The loss of soil through overland erosion would be much greater than the loss through wind erosion. It is estimated that 50 tons of soil are lost annually through overland erosion and eight tons are lost through wind erosion.

Vegetation

No significant changes to the vegetation would occur under the no action alternative

Noxious Weeds

No change in weed infestation along the roadside will occur under the no action alternative. Weed control measures are instituted annually along the Smiths Fork Road by the Lincoln County Weed and Pest District.

Cultural

No cultural resources would be affected under the no action alternative because none were identified by cultural inventories within the existing road right-of-way.

Native American Concerns

No Native American values, issues or concerns would be affected under the no action alternative. No Native American concerns are known to exist within the right-of-way.

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate Species

No cumulative effects to bald eagles, lynx, or wolves would occur.

Sensitive Species

Spawning habitat for Bonneville cutthroat trout, leatherside chubs, and other fishes downstream from the project area would continue to decline as sediments from the existing Smiths Fork Road accumulated. Fish movement within the system would continue to be restricted by culverts that do not allow fish passage. These impacts would likely lead to declining Bonneville cutthroat trout and populations throughout the Smiths Fork River system

Wetlands/Riparian

Wetlands and riparian areas would remain unchanged under the no action alternative. Some wetlands may be affected by small projects in the future that would have to be done as sections of the road are impacted by portions of the stream that cut away along the road. By not reconstructing now the cumulative impact of numerous small projects over time may impact more wetlands than the proposed action alternative.

Wild & Scenic Rivers

No affect to the status or eligibility of the Smiths Fork River or Dry Fork Creek waterways for eligibility for Wild and Scenic Rivers would occur under the no action alternative.

Economics

Under the no action alternative, economic activity associated with agricultural and recreational use of the Smiths Fork Road would remain basically the same.

Mitigation Measures:

1. All newly constructed fences could be designed to BLM specification for cattle in mule deer, elk and moose ranges to minimize impacts to the big game species that travel through the area.
2. Weed control could be initiated along the easement corridor following reconstruction.
3. Erosion control matting, mulch and/or bales of straw could be used to reduce any accelerated soil erosion as a result of soil disturbance activities.
4. Construction activity may be limited in the vicinity of the Bald Eagle nest near the Smiths Fork Bridge from February 1 to June 30. Some limited use, such as hauling gravel may occur, but "stationary" construction activities that could be in one place for more than one day would not be allowed.
5. A traffic counter could be installed on the road prior to, and following, reconstruction for monitoring changes in vehicle use. This would allow informed decision making regarding any further unanticipated impacts as a result of increases in vehicle use of the road and adjacent land resources.
6. A seasonal vehicle control gate could be installed at the beginning of the road if any damage to the reconstructed road is anticipated. The road could be closed following hunting season and not reopened until after the spring thaw when the roadbed sufficiently dries.
   Snowmobiles could be allowed continued use of the road easement during the winter and spring snow months.
7. No construction or surface disturbing activities will be allowed in designated elk calving areas from May 1 through June 30.
8. The following seed mixture, at a rate of 20 pounds per acre, could be used for any revegetation measures along the Smiths Fork Road corridor: Western Wheatgrass 4 lbs, Thickspike Wheatgrass 7 lbs., Green Needlegrass 4 lbs., Nebraska Sedge 4 lbs., Tufted Hairgrass 1 lb.

CUMULATIVE AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS

Reconstruction of the Smiths Fork Road should not result in any short or long term cumulative or residual impacts.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Persons and Agencies Consulted:

Kemmerer Field Office Staff
U.S. Forest Service, Bridger/Teton National Forest
Lincoln County, Wyoming
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

List of Preparers:

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